

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1

#### D. MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH

## Guidelines for introducing the practice of separating first communion from confirmation

*Prepared by the Board for Congregational Life, and adopted by General Synod in 1981 and 1984 (Guidelines 1–9 in 1981; Guidelines 10 and 11 in 1984).*

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Congregations who want to introduce the practice of separating first communion and confirmation accept and observe the following guidelines, for the sake of preserving good order and sound practice in the church:

1. Congregations are not obliged to adopt this approach to confirmation ministry. If they decide to introduce it they should do so only after they have studied thoroughly the advantages and disadvantages. They should also have the general approval of their membership.
2. Congregations should remain strongly committed to the importance of the confirmation ministry, and strive to make this ministry as effective as possible.
3. Admission to first communion should be preceded by a course of instruction appropriate to the level of the child. Particular attention should be given to the doctrines of sin and grace and the nature of the Lord's Supper.
4. First communion should be offered to children only when they have reached a stage of spiritual development at which they can understand what is necessary for them to receive the sacrament to their blessing. In general, it is considered that this should not be before children are 10 years old.
5. Readiness for first communion should be determined on an individual basis. Both child and parent(s) should be instructed and counselled. Those involved in the Christian education of the child should be consulted.
6. Children should not be pressured into preparing for first communion because they have reached a certain age, nor should first communion be seen as automatic at a certain age.

7. Parents whose children are to receive first communion should be given counselling on the importance of the confirmation ministry.
8. Congregations might well choose sponsors for children who are to receive first communion. These sponsors, who should have a continuing concern for the child at least until confirmation, could be the baptismal sponsors or other concerned adults.
9. In order to encourage proper reception of the sacrament by the child, parents or sponsors should provide spiritual care and supervision. Wherever possible they should commune with the child.
10. Congregations which allow children to commune before confirmation should realise that this does not automatically give the children the right to commune in other congregations. If the children visit or transfer to another congregation, they should observe the communion practices of that congregation. Children and their parents should have this point made clear to them before they make the decision to begin communing before confirmation.
11. Congregations which follow the traditional practice of combining first communion with confirmation are advised to consider what will be their attitude toward children who visit or transfer from other congregations in which they have been receiving communion before confirmation. The matter will have to be decided in Christian love. Two possible courses of action are:
  - The congregation may ask the children to respect and observe the traditional practice, and therefore to refrain from communing until they have been confirmed.
  - The congregation may decide to retain its traditional practice as the general rule, but to make exceptions in the case of non-confirmed children who are visiting or who are transferring from congregations where they have been permitted to commune.